

I want to recognize the work of the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee chair, ELAINE LURIA, for introducing H.R. 6168. I wholeheartedly support H.R. 6168, and urge all of my colleagues to do so as well.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 6168, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2020. The bill was introduced by Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee Chair ELAINE LURIA and Ranking Member MIKE BOST. I appreciate their leadership on this important issue.

The Department of Veterans Affairs provides compensation benefits to help fulfill our obligation to take care of the brave men and women who have been injured during their service to this great Nation.

H.R. 6168 would authorize a cost-of-living increase for veterans and their families next year, if Social Security recipients receive an increase. The annual COLA is necessary to help veterans and families afford their living expenses when prices go up.

Currently, many of our Nation's veterans may have been affected by this pandemic and are worried about how they are going to pay their bills. The last thing that should be on their minds is whether the value of their VA benefits will keep pace with inflation.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 6168.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. LURIA), my good friend and the chairwoman of the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee, the author of H.R. 6168, and a former naval commander.

Mrs. LURIA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of my bipartisan bill, H.R. 6168, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2020.

During these trying times, I continue to keep our Nation's veterans at the top of my mind as they face unprecedented challenges due to the coronavirus pandemic. This bill will provide the economic relief and pay raise that our veterans have earned.

It is an honor to represent more than 102,000 veterans, the highest total of any district in Virginia, and one of the highest in the country. Our veterans put their lives on the line and deployed far from home to keep America safe. As a 20-year Navy veteran myself, I am proud to bring a bill to the floor that protects the benefits our veterans have earned from their service to our country.

H.R. 6168 provides cost-of-living increases for wartime disability compensation, compensation for depend-

ents, clothing allowance, dependency and indemnities compensation for spouses, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving children.

Congress must honor our commitment to those American heroes who served in harm's way so that we could live in peace at home. As we continue to fight this pandemic, I ask that we all keep in mind those who have kept us safe at home and abroad.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 6168, and join me and Ranking Member MIKE BOST in protecting the earned benefits for our Nation's veterans.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to close. I appreciate the Members, Mrs. LURIA and Mr. BOST, bringing this important bill up. We pass it every year. I encourage all of my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I, too, urge all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 6168.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 6168.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2020

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 3414) to authorize major medical facility projects for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2020, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 3414

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Major Medical Facility Authorization Act of 2020".

SEC. 2. AUTHORIZATION OF MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECTS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2020.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may carry out the following major medical facility projects in fiscal year 2020 at the locations specified and in an amount for each project not to exceed the amount specified for such location:

(1) Construction of an outpatient clinic and national cemetery in Alameda, California, in an amount not to exceed \$113,332,000.

(2) Realignment and closure of the Livermore Campus in Livermore, California, in an amount not to exceed \$311,730,000.

(3) Construction of a new medical facility in Louisville, Kentucky, in an amount not to exceed \$860,000,000.

(4) Construction relating to flood recovery of the medical center in Manhattan, New

York, in an amount not to exceed \$372,600,000.

(5) Construction of a spinal cord injury building with a community living center, including a parking garage, in San Diego, California, in an amount not to exceed \$230,840,000.

(6) Completion of construction of a medical facility project, including a parking garage, in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in an amount not to exceed \$307,000,000.

(7) Construction of a new critical care center in West Los Angeles, California, in an amount not to exceed \$75,790,000.

(b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2020 or the year in which funds are appropriated for the Construction, Major Projects account, \$2,271,292,000 for the projects authorized in subsection (a).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVID P. ROE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on S. 3414.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of S. 3414, the Major Medical Facility Authorization Act of 2020.

Each year the Department of Veterans Affairs submits an annual budget request to Congress, and then it is our job to authorize and appropriate the funding that VA needs to care for America's veterans and their families.

Within that larger funding request is VA's request for funds to replace and modernize its medical facilities. This year's major construction requests total \$2.27 billion, and will build a new critical care center in West Los Angeles, California; complete construction of a medical facility project in San Juan, Puerto Rico; construct a spinal cord injury center with a community living center in San Diego, California; complete flood recovery construction at the medical center in Manhattan, New York; and fully fund the medical facility replacement project in Louisville, Kentucky; as well as construct an outpatient clinic and a national cemetery in Alameda, California; and finally, realign the Livermore, California campus.

Mr. Speaker, with a major construction need that totals more than \$15 billion, this authorization takes needed steps to reduce the backlog of major construction projects.

It is no secret that VA's infrastructure is old. The average age of its facilities is 60. The Secretary of the VA himself, Secretary Wilkie, emphasized this point by making the statement: There are several VA facilities that Abraham Lincoln would recognize.

Even with outdated facilities, the Annals of Internal Medicine found in a 2018 report that VA provides better care than private options in most cases. That is right. VA provides better care, even though they are working from outdated facilities. What would those findings look like if VA was competing with a modern infrastructure?

Mr. Speaker, not only does VA provide better care, veterans want to use VA-delivered healthcare. A survey conducted by the Veterans of Foreign Wars found that 92 percent of veterans who participated in the survey responded that fixing VA facilities was the best way to improve VA's delivery of healthcare to veterans.

Ninety percent of respondents who use VA stated they would recommend VA healthcare to another veteran.

It is clear that veterans, given the option, want to preserve the VA healthcare system and feel that it is a quality option for veterans to receive care.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I support S. 3414. I thank Senator MORAN, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, for prioritizing and passing this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

□ 0930

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of S. 3414, the VA Major Medical Facility Authorization Act. This bill is sponsored by my good friends on the other side of the Capitol, Chairman JERRY MORAN and Ranking Member JON TESTER of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

This bill would authorize the construction of the Department of Veterans Affairs major medical facility projects in Kentucky, California, New York, and Puerto Rico. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the value of the VA healthcare system in serving not just our Nation's veterans, which is the Department's foremost responsibility, but also in supporting all Americans during times of crisis.

The seven projects that would be authorized in this legislation have been requested by the administration in VA's most recent budget submission. They would increase access to high-quality care and services to veterans of all ages and eras. It would also ensure that VA is better able to fulfill the Department's important service training, research, and emergency response missions.

Mr. Speaker, to associate myself with the chairman's remarks, Abraham Lincoln would recognize the VA medical center in my hometown, which was authorized right after the Civil War and opened in 1903 as an Old Soldiers' Home and now is a first-class VA medical center.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting this bill. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I am prepared to close. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers. I urge all of my colleagues to join in supporting this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues to vote "yes" on passage of this important legislation, S. 3414, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, S. 3414.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

MODIFYING PAY LIMITATION FOR CERTAIN HIGH-LEVEL EMPLOYEES AND OFFICERS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 3084) to amend title 38, United States Code, to modify the limitation on pay for certain high-level employees and officers of the Department of Veterans Affairs, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 3084

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. MODIFICATION OF PAY LIMITATION FOR CERTAIN HIGH-LEVEL EMPLOYEES AND OFFICERS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) MODIFICATION.—Section 7404(d) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting "and except for individuals appointed under sections 7401(4) and 7306 of this title," after "section 7457 of this title,".

(b) WAIVERS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may waive the limitation described in section 7404(d) of such title, as in effect on the day before the date of the enactment of this Act, on the amount of basic pay payable to individuals appointed under section 7401(4) or 7306 of such title for basic pay payable during the period—

(A) beginning on November 1, 2010; and

(B) ending on the day before the date of the enactment of this Act.

(2) FORM.—The Secretary shall prescribe the form for requesting a waiver under paragraph (1).

(3) TREATMENT OF WAIVER.—A decision not to grant a waiver under paragraph (1) shall not be treated as an adverse action and is not subject to further appeal, third-party review, or judicial review.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVID P. ROE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members

may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on S. 3084, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of S. 3084, as amended, a bill to modify the limitation on pay for certain high-level employees and officers of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This legislation retroactively authorizes VA to waive a limitation for basic pay for SES-equivalent employees employed at VA dating back to November 1, 2010. These are senior-level clinicians who oversee critical VA medical operations at the VA Central Office and in Veterans Integrated Service Networks.

Due to a conflicting interpretation of the law, these senior-level employees were overpaid by VA for almost 10 years. VA did not notify Congress that it had been interpreting the pay cap in its statute as not applying to these employees until this year.

Mr. Speaker, the Office of Management and Budget and Office of Personnel Management have said this is an issue that affects approximately 40 senior VA employees, some of whom play critical support roles in VA's response to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, without this legislative fix, these employees, through no fault of their own, will be liable for a salary overpayment, plus any benefits tied to the salary, to include employee and agency retirement fund contributions.

While VA could request a waiver of this debt on behalf of the employees under the law, a waiver will not completely address the negative financial effects these employees will experience. Their retirement and Thrift Savings Plan matching debt cannot be corrected.

Mr. Speaker, VA has been making up the difference between the \$156,000 cap and the rate of pay that has been received by the affected employees with bonuses, which do not count toward employee and agency retirement fund contributions and other Federal benefits.

Since VA has faced significant challenges hiring qualified healthcare leaders in the past, removing any remaining barriers to ensuring VA can recruit and retain senior clinicians is crucial.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all Members to support S. 3084, as amended, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of S. 3084, as amended. This bill is sponsored by Chairman JERRY MORAN and Ranking Member JON TESTER of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and I am grateful for them for introducing it.